

1 Samuel 1:1-20

A Son is Given

- A. For all the massive problems we find in this broken world. Nations at war. Political unrest. Natural disasters. Isn't it remarkable that God while ruling and directing all of creation He concerns Himself with what concerns the lowliest of His children?
- B. Surely the time in which the book of 1 Samuel begins is a time where there were massive problems. The time of the Judges out of which this story emerges was a time in Israel's short history that was marked by immense tragedy and national infidelity. The author of judges summaries the situation with God's people in this way, "In those days there was no king in Israel. Everyone did what was right in his own eyes."¹ The people had rejected the LORD who was to be their king.
 - A. So the books of Judges ended with a problem, "no king, which meant no holiness, no peace, no righteousness." But the book Ruth taking place during the time of Judges ends with the lineage of the one who would be king. And as we come to the book of 1 Samuel, a new day is dawning in the history of redemption. It is the beginning of a new era in the history of God's people. Samuel takes us, with many twists and turns, from the kingless, godless condition in Israel to the establishment of a monarchy in the lineage of David which of course paves the way for the great promised King, Jesus. But as this new day is on the horizon with God's extraordinary purposes at work, the Lord focuses our attention first on a childless woman with tears streaming down her face, pouring out her heart to the Lord in those desperate times.
 - B. We'll take this morning's passage in 4 parts; 1) Light in the Dark, 2) Hardships in the Home, 3) Before the Throne of Grace, and 4) The Lord who Remembers.
- I. Light in the Dark (1-3)
 - A. The time of the judges marked dark days in Israel in fact they were so dark that the book of Judges presents Israel not merely as being like their pagan neighbors, but worse. And yet the book of judges was not the end of the story because the Lord even in the midst of those dark days was not finished with His people. Though they are faithless to the core He remains faithful. And so where will he begin this new chapter. It doesn't begin in a palace or mansion but with an assuming family in the hill country of Ephraim.
 - B. This story it begins with a glimmer of light in the darkness. We are introduced in verses 1-3 to a man and his family before focusing on his wife, Hannah.
 - 1. Verse 1 tells us who this man, Elkanah, is both in terms of location and lineage. He lives in the hill country of Ephraim. However he was not from the tribe of Ephraim. And though he had family that settled in Ephratha, the other name of Bethlehem, he was not from the tribe of Judah either. He was actually a Levite. That's an important point because that explains why Samuel will be able to serve in the tabernacle; he is a Levite. Not much of a backstory but that's background we get.

¹ Judges 21:25.

2. But skipping down for a moment to verse 3 we find that there is something different about this man and his family. They weren't like many others. "Now this man used to go up year by year from his city to worship and to sacrifice to the LORD of hosts at Shiloh, where the two sons of Eli, Hophni and Phinehas, were priests of the LORD."
3. As we'll see in verse 2 this is not a perfect man nor a perfect family and yet we see something rare in those days. While everyone was doing what was right in their own eyes. This man sought to worship the Lord of Host, YHWH Sabbaoth. This is the very first time scripture uses the name 'Lord of Hosts.' And this name speaks to contrast between the kinglessness of Israel and this family who worships the Lord as King. That name 'Lord of Hosts' 'Lord of Armies' speaks particularly to the Lord as the Sovereign ruler and King of the universe reigning omnipotent.
4. And every year this man and his family went and worshipped the Lord in Shiloh where the tabernacle was set up. Offering sacrifices, as Lord commanded Moses. This is a rare glimmer of light, worshippers of the Lord. Piety that is expressed by Elkanah and Hannah.
 - a) This is a reminder for us that even in dark and tumultuous days the Lord's people are never blotted out. Elijah learned lesson in his complaint. And we should remind ourselves of that from time to time. The crises and chaos from the news cycles that tempt us to believe that all is lost and we are the only ones left. The Lord keeps and maintain and sustains his people. Christ's kingdom though at times looking meager, is still unassailable. For the Lord of Hosts, our Sovereign God ensures that the light is never extinguished.

II. Hardships in the Home (4-9)

- A. Elkanah was a generally pious man but there was one aspect of this family that is particularly disconcerting. In fact it's the aspect that will make for hardships in the home. Because this otherwise pious man took a second wife. Verse two tells us that he had two wives one was Hannah the other Peninnah but we should understand that are being told that the first was Hannah. The second was Peninnah. And we see that there is a reason why Elkanah would take a second wife. Hannah had no children. She was barren. The Lord closed her womb, verse 5. That was a problem for her husband because to not have children would mean the end Elkanah's name and lineage. It was considered shameful to have no children. And it's probably for that reason that he took a second wife.
- B. But we should understand that scripture by no means condones polygamy. It's contrary God's design for marriage between one man and one woman. And so it's no surprise that when that monogamous union intended by God is disrupted there is brokenness. Think of Abraham and Sarah, and the hurt and bitterness that result from Abraham taking Sarah's servant Hagar in order to have children because Sarah couldn't. Of course that was Sarah's idea but she soon realized how bad of an idea it was. Think of rivalry between Rachel and Leah. Think of disaster that resulted from Solomon having many wives. Those are just a few of many examples.

- C. As verse 1 and 3 have provided a picture of generally pious leitical family, verse 2 and 4-9 give us an inside view of the hardships in the home, focusing on a particular event. We are taken in verse 4 on one the yearly family trips to worship and sacrifice in Shiloh. A tradition that grieves Hannah every year. You see during this time of worship at Shiloh, the trip culminated in a worship meal. A portion of the animals sacrificed were given to the worshipper to eat. Perhaps we're looking at the peace offering, or fellowship offering as it's sometimes called.
1. And during this sacramental meal Elkanah would distribute the meat to his family. To his second wife Peninnah and their children.
 2. But to Hannah, he gave a double portion because he loved her. Her barrenness did not lessen his affections for her. So he offers this double portion as a loving gesture.
 3. However, having two wives this gesture of love and favoritism was used as an instigation of the underlying tensions. That double portion to Hannah was an opportune time for "her rival," Hebrew has a word for a wife who is less favored. And so when the favoritism was shown the 'rival-wife,' used her fertility to grieve Hannah about her barrenness. Which for Hannah became a kind of thorn in the flesh.
 4. It seems that every year it was the same routine, which ended in tears and sorrow. So sorrowful that Hannah could not even eat of this precious meal.
 5. Here at Shiloh she felt so acutely the sting of childlessness. A pain not reserved for the ancient world. It's a grief born by many in this broken world.
 - a) And even if you've not personally been grieved by that grief surely there are other griefs from this broken world that you have born. Sorrows that are provoked. Sorrows that no one really seems to understand.
 - b) Elkanah tried to be sensitive but his questions to Hannah show that he doesn't get it. "Hannah, why do you weep? And why do you not eat? And why is your heart sad? Am I not more to you than ten sons?"
 - c) He seems blind to the tensions between his wives. And the reality is that by taking another wife he distanced himself from Hannah. After all he has children. In many ways Hannah bears that unfulfilled desire and grief alone, at least in terms of other people.
- D. We all want someone who understands us, who can sympathize with us, who can comfort us. But seeking such things in other people we will eventually realize that there are limits there. As close as relationships may be with other people they can't see our hearts and know fully our experiences.
- E. If we are seeking to have our deepest griefs consoled by other people we'll soon find that they will come up short. Sometimes that because of sin. Maybe our spouse just doesn't care enough to take the time. Or doesn't want to share in those burdens. But sometimes comfort comes up short because we're expecting a comfort that only God can give. Our friends can tire of hearing about our problems and not because they don't care but because they are merely human. And on our side perhaps sharing our griefs itself becomes a kind of cathartic experience that can quickly turn into merely complaining.

- F. But remarkably the Lord uses those limits of comfort from other people and even the instigations of our sorrows to drive us to the one who is our only comfort in life and in death.
- G. So rather than seeking comforters or descending into complaining Hannah here follows a different path. A path we would do well to follow. Like the instruction from the psalmist in Psalm 68, "O people; pour out your heart before him; God is a refuge for us." Or like the Apostle Paul who says, "do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God." When Hannah's griefs fill her heart to overflowing she knows just where to go. She goes before the throne of grace.

III. Before the Throne of Grace (9-18)

- A. After this meal is over, of which she could bear to eat, she goes to where the Lord promised to meet with His people. The tabernacle. The place Jesus said, "shall be called a house of prayer..."²
- B. Hannah goes before the throne of grace with her deep distress and she prayed and wept bitterly. I want us to grasp something very important here. There are two things tied together that sometimes we think are not compatible. Hannah prayed and wept bitterly. It is sometimes imagined that bitter tears and faith in God are incompatible. That expressing our sorrows and disappointments in life to God are themselves acts of faithlessness and failure to trust him. But beloved as we are driven to the throne of grace by the grief we bear, those things go together.
 - 1. As Andrew Steinmann notes, "Hannah's behavior before [the Lord] is indicative of a person who is severely distressed but not without faith in God's power. She weeps, but she also trusts the [the Lord] is able to provide her with relief from her torment."³
 - 2. We see that fact in what she prays, "O Lord of Hosts..." That's no mere formality but trust in the Lord's universal rule that includes every and all power in heaven and on earth.
 - 3. And to Him she pours out her heart under the assumption that her broken heart matters to Him.⁴ Friends may fail us, no one may seem to understand us but the Lord knows. And the Lord cares. And the Lord has power to act. As the Psalmists tells us, "You have kept count of my tossing; put my tears in your bottle. Are they not in your book?"⁵
 - 4. And as she prayed she vowed a solemn vow to the Lord.
 - a) Verse 11, "O LORD of hosts, if you will indeed look on the affliction of your servant and remember me and not forget your servant, but will give to your

² Matthew 21:22.

³ Andrew Steinmann, 1 Samuel, 54.

⁴ Dale Ralph Davis, 1 Samuel, 18-19.

⁵ Psalm 56:8.

servant a son, then I will give him to the LORD all the days of his life, and no razor shall touch his head.”

5. Here we see the remarkable moment when the will of God in His sovereign purposes and the will of Hannah in her grief converge. Here Hannah is not bargaining with God. God delights to use the prayers of His beloved saints in bringing about His holy purposes. Hannah wills in bitter grief we find is aligned with God’s holy purpose.
 6. The very face that she desires to give this child to serve the Lord proves that it is the Lord’s kingdom that she seeks even as she longs for the Lord to fulfill the good desires of her heart. Those things are not mutually exclusive.
 7. It is not selfish for Hannah to pray for this God given desire that is submitted to His will. But is in fact the usefulness of her griefs directed toward the kingdom of God. This desired child will be no ordinary child, he will be set apart for the service of the Lord. A Nazarite for life. He will be the prophet of the Lord of Hosts.
- C. Hannah was so focused in her prayers that she didn’t noticed that she was being watched. Eli the high priest was sitting there verse 9, he was watching her verse 12. But in the house of God, which shall be called a house of prayer, Eli’s first thought as he saw her lips moving but heard no words is not that this woman was praying, which is what people should be doing at the tabernacle after making sacrifices, but he thinks that she was drunk.
1. Now that tells us something about what was happening in Israel at this time. Apparently worshippers of the Lord were functioning as pagans getting drunk at their worship feasts. We’ll see more of that when it comes to Eli’s sons but we at least here see that the prayers of the faithful must have been few and far between. And yet for Eli to fail to recognize the prayers of the faithful is not just a problem with the worshippers but with his own priesthood. The high preset doesn’t even know what genuine faith looks like.
 2. And so Eli rebukes her. Tells her to put away the wine and stop being a drunk.
- D. But Hannah humbly sets the record straight, “No, my lord, I am a woman troubled in spirit. I have drunk neither wine nor strong drink, but I have been pouring out my soul before the LORD. 16 Do not regard your servant as a worthless woman, for all along I have been speaking out of my great anxiety and vexation.”
1. She is not a worthless women, literally a daughter of Belial. Daughter of satan, or destruction, damnation. She was not pouring in wine, but pouring out her soul. For she is a daughter of the Lord of Hosts, who hears her prayers.
 2. At one moment Eli’s rebuking Hannah as drunk and the next he’s pronouncing a blessing. “Go in peace, and the God of Israel grant your petition that you have made to him.”
 3. The contrast between Hannah and Eli couldn’t be more stark. For Eli it seems that his ministry there at Shiloh is perfunctory. Notice how he speak about God. He calls him simply the God of Israel whereas Hannah and Elkanah know Him as the Lord of hosts. The sovereign ruler and king of the universe.

4. Eli as we'll see in the unfolding story is out of touch. And yet Hannah hangs on his words. Not because Eli's a great priest who sympathizes but because Eli is functioning in his office and giving to her the very word of God. And she treasures God's words.
 - E. Isn't it astounding that the LORD of hosts, the sovereign of the universe, who is at work in bringing forth the redemption of sinners, orchestrating all of world history, upholding all creation, concerns Himself with the sorrows of the lowliest? That Hannah can be sure that the Lord heard. And that after pouring out her heart she can know that He understands, and that she can rest her sorrows in His hands. Trusting His power and His will.
 1. We must understand something about our deepest sorrows. The Lord is not unaware or surprised by his people's griefs. After all it was the Lord who closed Hannah's womb. But rather than making God an enemy, Hannah trusted that the Lord is good and does all things well.
 2. Hannah reminds us of the freedom we have to pour out our hearts to the Lord, who not only hears but has the power to work in our deepest sorrows, and in fact to even work in our hearts from which we speak those sorrows.
 3. I wonder whether we need to consider once again the truth shown here. That our prayers are heard by the Lord of hosts. I wonder whether in your prayers you may have lost sight of who our God is. Perhaps you're ashamed of your deepest distresses so you don't take it to the Lord. Or perhaps you think that the Lord has bigger things to deal with than your personal hurts.
 - a) Beloved the Lord bids us come to throne of grace no matter what our burdens are, great or small. The Lord never tires of our prayers, the Lord knows our hearts better than even we do.
 4. And if Hannah was able to find consolation from the word of God through the high priest Eli, how much more should we find comfort in the consolations of our great high priest, Jesus Christ, in whom all of God's promises are yes and amen. Who having died for our sins and was raised for our justification, now sitting upon the throne of grace in heaven, listens to cries of His people, intercedes for them before the Father on account of His precious blood, and brings to fruition all manner of blessedness for them in Him.
 - a) If we will go to the throne of grace to pour out our hearts, let us also be expectedly awaiting His Holy Word through his Holy Spirit to console our hearts. Psalm 94:19, "When the cares of my heart are many, your consolations cheer my soul."
 - b) The blessing of God changed Hannah disposition, she ate, her face brightened, her heart was warmed. His promise through not yet realized, gave her the strength to continue on by faith. And beloved God by His Words of promise does the same for us, And so let us listen, and let us take His words to heart.
- IV. The Lord who Remembers (19-20)
- A. In His time the Lord remembered Hannah. Look with me at verses 19-20, "They rose early in the morning and worshiped before the LORD; then they went back to their

house at Ramah. And Elkanah knew Hannah his wife, and the LORD remembered her. 20 And in due time Hannah conceived and bore a son, and she called his name Samuel, for she said, "I have asked for him from the LORD."

- B. The Lord remembered Hannah. And this divine remembrance is not an intellectual recollection, as if the Lord could forget one of His children, but remembrance of the Lord of hosts whose sovereign hand closed Hannah womb for His secret purposes and now in His time according to His grace and will opened her womb to make her the mother of a son.
 - 1. And she named him, Samuel. Meaning 'God heard.' She asked and God heard. But of course this story of God's grace in the gift of this son was far bigger than this one grieving woman.
 - 2. It is as if Hannah carried in her chest the throbbing heart of Israel's pain of sin and misery due to its effects. And though God's people had turned from Him to find other comforters, Hannah show us where the hope of Israel lies. It is in the Lord of Hosts. You see the promise of land flowing with milk and honey; of peace and righteousness and fruitfulness had met the hard reality of hardened hearts and a broken world.
 - 3. But God in the opening verses of 1 Samuel amid impossible circumstances through weak and powerless people is doing something new. Like when He made the promise to childless Abraham of a vast family of faith, like when he raised up Moses from the enslaved Hebrews, preserving him through the Pharaoh's edicts of extermination.
 - 4. Here God through the sorrows of a barren women was once again moving His redemptive purposes into a new era as Samuel will become the king maker, setting the stage for the king of God's own choosing, David, who then is but a type of the righteous and glorious savior, King Jesus.
- C. It is no mere coincidence that Samuel's birth as a prophet of God as forerunner to the king, bears so much resemblance to the birth of John the Baptist from the barrenness of His mother Elizabeth. And in that way isn't it remarkable how from Abraham to Moses, from Samuel to John that our Sovereign Lord remains the same Lord who graciously welcomes the sorrows and grief of His people and from their weakness and need bring forth His merciful and mighty ends.
- D. Beloved we can all take comfort here. That because a son was given to which Samuel and John point. The Son, the Lord Jesus. Because He was given we in our deepest griefs, are gladly welcomed us to the throne of grace where we find forgiveness and mercy, where we find the comforts of His love toward us. That though our sins be many, Jesus has put away all our sins on the cross. Though we in sin had broken fellowship with Him, He restored it by His death and resurrection. Though we often feel alone in the burdens we bear, Jesus promises that He is with us always, He does not forget us. And therefore through Him we have ready access before the throne of grace. And what the Lord desires is not perfunctory prayers, or hesitant guarded petitions, but hearts poured out to Him. Beloved, follow Hannah there, to the Lord of Host, to the King of Kings, to the Son who was given.